United Nations

Press Release

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TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General, addressing European Parliament, stresses danger created by heavy concentration of armaments in Middle East; calls for dialogue between Western Europe and developing world.

- Japan and Greece announce emergency humanitarian assistance to displaced Kurds in northern Iraq; Japan also donates $8 million to support activities of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to help Ethiopian returnees from Somalia and Somali refugees in Ethiopia.

- Regional seminar on impact of economic and political reform on status of women in Eastern Europe and Soviet Union concludes in Vienna. Hears calls for integration of women's interests in social and economic policy.

- Peru is hit by earthquakes which kill 53 and injures 232 people, according to report by Office of United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator.

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Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar arrived in Strasbourg this morning to address the European Parliament and to hold discussions in the afternoon with a large group of parliamentarians.

Before addressing the Parliament in a solemn meeting, the Secretary-General had half an hour of talks with the Parliament's President, Enrique Baron Crespo, with whom he discussed the problem of minorities in Europe and the situation of the Kurds in Iraq.

In his address, the Secretary-General stressed the dangers created by the heavy concentration of armaments in regions such as the Middle East, and called for a dialogue between Western Europe and the developing world.

In the afternoon, the Secretary-General met parliamentarians and representatives of the political groups in the European Parliament to answer questions from them concerning all aspects of the United Nations work.

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The Secretary-General then received two representatives of the Council of Europe, Messrs. Davies and Rosenstiel, who delivered to him a message from the President of the Council of Europe, Catherine Lalumiere, on the situation of the Kurds in Iraq. The Secretary-General then met with former French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing for a discussion of the international situation.

The Secretary-General was scheduled to meet later in the afternoon with Jacques Poos, President of the Council of the European Community and Foreign Minister of Luxembourg. He would then meet with Vasos Lyssarides, President of the Parliament of Cyprus, before leaving Strasbourg for Paris, where for the next three days he will preside over meetings of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) and will meet with President François Mitterrand of France.

As he entered the European Parliament this morning, the Secretary-General was asked by the press whether he thought that the decision taken by the European Community to put Iraqi President Saddam Hussein on trial for war crimes could interfere with his diplomacy in Iraq. The Secretary-General replied that it was an initiative which he respected, but which deserved much study and reflection in order not to prejudice the humanitarian action of the United Nations.

In a separate development, a United Nations official announced today that Nepal had inadvertently been omitted from the list of countries participating in the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM).

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The Government of Japan has decided to dispatch a disaster relief team to Iran and to send emergency relief materials to Iran and Turkey to help Kurdish refugees.

In a statement dated 12 April, and transmitted by Japanese Ambassador Yoshio Hatano, the Government's Foreign Ministry said it had initiated relief efforts out of humanitarian concern and in response to requests from Iran and Turkey.

The Japanese decision comes in addition to a donation of $10 million to the Iraqi refugees through the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO).

The Government of Greece has also decided to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to displaced Kurds. In a press release issued yesterday, Greece's Permanent Mission to the United Nations announced that the first cargo of assistance, consisting of foodstuff, clothing and medicines, had already been delivered to the Iranian Red Crescent by a mission of the Hellenic Red Cross led by its President.

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In a separate development, the Japanese Ambassador informed the Secretary-General, in a letter dated 11 April, that his Government had decided to donate about $8 million to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to support its activities in favour of the Ethiopian returnees from Somalia and Somali refugees in Ethiopia.

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Women in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were likely to experience increased hardship as a result of recent economic and political reforms, according to speakers at a United Nations regional seminar which ended in Vienna on 12 April.

The prospect of sweeping change retarding rather than advancing the pace of equality was highlighted in various studies that were presented at the seminar. The conclusions drawn pointed to a growing threat of a negative impact on the status of women, especially in the short run, as economic hardships were likely to increase. The loosening of the social safety net, the decline in living standards, along with growing unemployment, were cited as likely to have a more severe effect on women than on men.

The recommendations adopted at the seminar called for integrating women's interests into social and economic policy, strengthening national bodies on women's advancement and assisting women in training and retraining to meet employment challenges. Participants also recommended that all bilateral assistance programmes to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union should be designed to ensure that women participate in, and benefit from, such assistance.

The five-day seminar, which began on 8 April, was organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Office at Vienna, with substantive support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

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According to a report issued today by UNDRO, 53 people died and 232 were injured in earthquakes which hit Peru from 4 to 8 April.

The agency reported eight seismic shocks which measured between 4.5 and 6.2 on the Richter scale. The earthquakes struck in the north-eastern part of Peru, in the Moyabamba and Rioja provinces.

Over 9,000 dwellings had been affected, UNDRO said, particularly in rural areas, which were already hit in May last year. The relief agency reported that many residents were still living outside their homes, without proper shelter and sanitation, in the fear of further shocks, the likelihood of which was confirmed by experts.